

January 11, 2013
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
 Fisheries Bureau
 Endangered Species Coordinator
 Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries Division
 Kalispell Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
Lake County Conservation District, 64352 Highway 93, Ronan, MT 59864
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
The Nature Conservancy, 32 South Ewing Street, Helena, MT 59601
The Trust for Public Land, 111 South Grand Avenue, Suite 203, Bozeman, MT 59715
MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620
Swan Lake Ranger District, 200 Ranger Station Road, Bigfork, MT 59911

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling to repair a failing bridge located on South Woodward Creek, a tributary located in the Swan River drainage. South Woodward Creek supports important spawning and rearing habitat for the Swan Lake bull trout population. The abutments on the existing bridge are starting to fail, and if failure would occur, a substantial quantity of fine sediment would be delivered to the stream. The intent of the project is to repair this bridge before catastrophic failure could occur in order to protect important habitat used by spawning and rearing bull trout. The proposed project is located approximately 12 miles east of the town of Polson in Lake County. The property, currently owned by The Nature Conservancy, is in the process of being conveyed to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., February 15, 2013 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
South Woodward Creek Bridge Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the repair of a structurally failing bridge located on South Woodward Creek. The abutments on this bridge are failing and there is a risk of mass wasting and subsequent delivery of a substantial quantity of fine sediment into the stream. South Woodward Creek, a tributary located in the Swan River drainage, is an important spawning and rearing tributary for Swan Lake bull trout. This potential influx of sediment could smother bull trout spawning and rearing habitat. The project site is located approximately 12 miles east of the town of Polson in Lake County. The property, currently owned by The Nature Conservancy, is in the process of being conveyed to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on an existing bridge located on South Woodward Creek within Township 23 North, Range 18 West, Section 29 in Lake County (Attachment 1).

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on private and public lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

South Woodward Creek, a tributary to Woodward Creek located in the Swan River drainage, is an important spawning and rearing tributary for the Swan Lake bull trout population. Swan Lake is one of the last remaining strongholds for migratory bull trout in Montana. An existing bridge on South Woodward Creek is starting to fail (Attachment 2). The existing bridge utilizes very tall, precast concrete abutments and wing walls to retain about 100 cubic yards of fill on each of the two approaches. Presently, the abutment and wing wall joints are separating and the wing walls are distorting and cracking as a result of extreme fill pressures. Engineers have determined that bridge failure is fairly certain if work is not completed to stabilize the structure. If the abutments were to fail, the bridge would collapse and the fill behind them would fall into the stream. This fine sediment would smother spawning and rearing habitat used by bull trout. This project calls for repairing and stabilizing this existing bridge.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project would restore and stabilize an existing bridge crossing South Woodward Creek by

removing the existing fill behind the bridge abutments, resetting and realigning the abutments and wing walls, repairing and reinstalling wing wall and abutment dead-man reinforcements and refilling behind the abutments with low moisture content fill that is properly compacted and bound with layers of filter fabric. This project is expected to cost \$61,462.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$24,600.00. The remainder of the funding would come from outside sources and in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind service	In-kind cash
DNRC	\$1,000.00	\$20,462.00
The Trust For Public Land	\$462.00	\$20,000.00

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Repairing an existing bridge on South Woodward Creek that currently is subject to failure would prevent a potential catastrophic input of sediment into the stream. This input of sediment would smother existing bull trout spawning and rearing habitat. The Woodward Creek drainage, including South Woodward Creek, typically accounts for 10 to 20% of all bull trout spawning redds for fluvial Swan lake fish.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, the operation of equipment in the active stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 310 permit (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be temporarily disturbed during construction. All disturbed areas would be re-vegetated with a native grass seed mix.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Woodward Creek and South Woodward Creek are major spawning and rearing tributaries for the Swan Lake bull trout population. Failure of the bridge on South Woodward Creek would damage this important bull trout habitat and the loss of this habitat would adversely affect the Swan Lake bull trout population and the Swan Lake recreational fishery.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

This project site was previously disturbed by the construction of the road and bridge. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the proposed project. Should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted and the site will be investigated.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals.

This project is one of the habitat measures identified by the Montana Legacy Project and a joint Swan River State Forest restoration plan. The Montana Legacy Project consolidated lands in the Swan River drainage to address the problematic, century old, checker-board pattern of land ownership. The Trust for Public Lands and The Nature Conservancy have acted as intermediaries in this land consolidation and are now in the process of conveying remaining tracts into Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation ownership.

14. Transportation networks & traffic flows.

Traffic on a portion of the road likely would be delayed, interrupted, or re-routed during construction. The period of construction is expected to take no longer than three weeks.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program, the applicant would have to either seek other sources of funding to complete the project or the risk of catastrophic failure of an existing bridge on South Woodward Creek would remain high. Important bull trout habitat would be adversely affected should this bridge fail.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to repair and stabilize an existing bridge on South Woodward Creek that currently is at risk of failure. Stabilizing this bridge would prevent the potential for catastrophic failure and, as a result, would help maintain important spawning and rearing habitat for

Swan lake bull trout.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the Future Fisheries Improvement Program has been posted on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on February 15, 2013.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Section
Fisheries Bureau
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title South Woodward Creek Bridge Repair Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Bureau -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the repair of an existing bridge on South Woodward Creek that currently is at risk of failure. Catastrophic failure of the bridge would lead to mass wasting of fine sediment into the stream and would harm important bull trout spawning and rearing habitat. The intent of the project is to protect important spawning and rearing habitat for Swan Lake bull trout. The project site is located approximately 6 miles east of the town of Polson in Lake County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals			X			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows			X			X

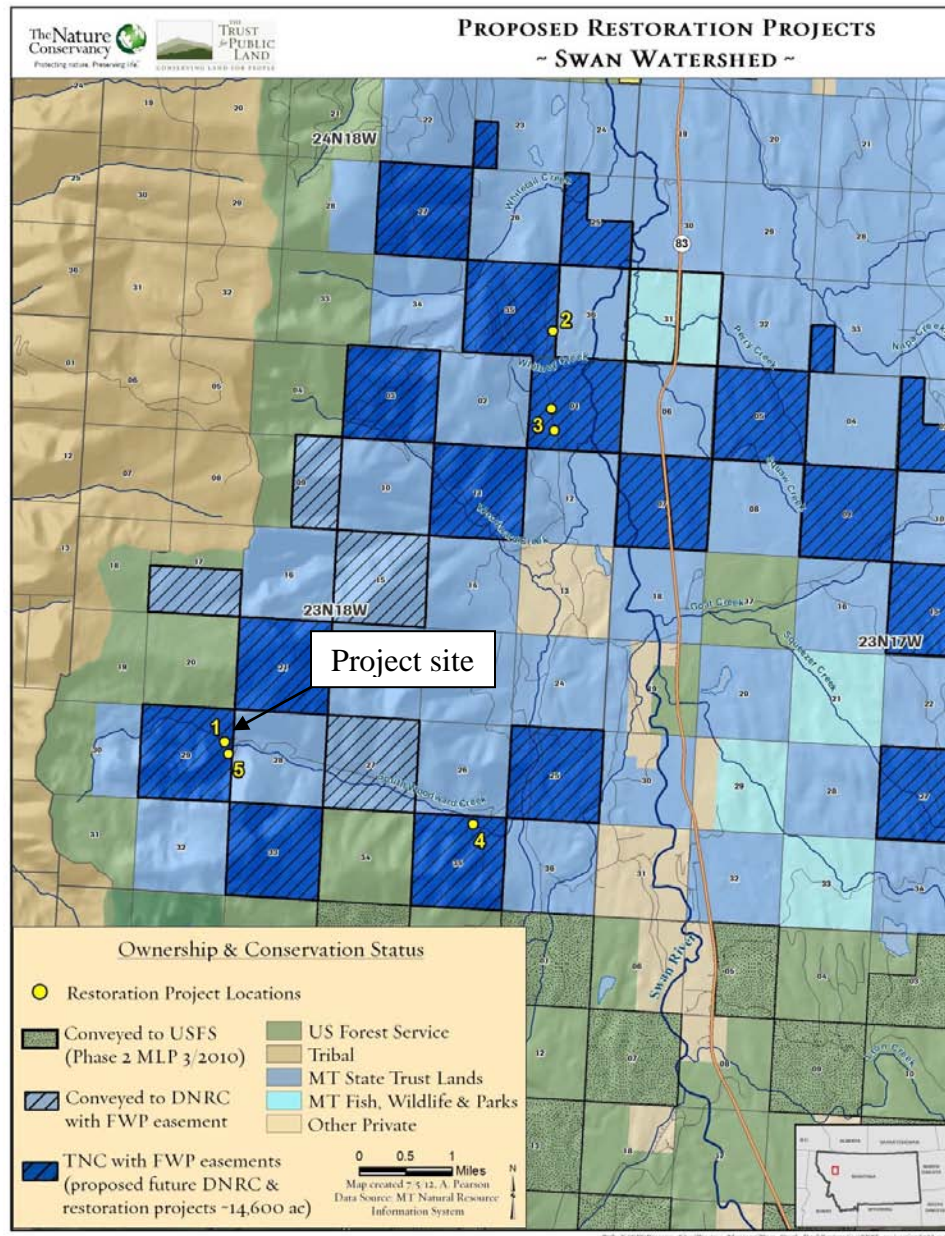
Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Lake County Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation

Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Lisa Bay, Lisa Bay Consulting
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: January 8, 2013



Attachment 1



Attachment 2